

Snap Election in Ireland: no compromise with Sinn Fein

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Taoiseach Enda Kenny has called a General Election for February 26. This will be the shortest election campaign in the history of the state, just three weeks. In response to this indecent haste, a Sinn Fein TD's comment summed it up well as 'a pathetic end to a pathetic Dail?.'

Indeed it was a pathetic Dail, headed by the pathetic Fine Gael and Labour coalition government that has provoked widespread anger at the introduction of water charges. The scale of the rebellion took everyone by surprise but it was the last straw that had seen the Irish people endure six years of unrelenting austerity at the behest of the Troika (IMF, ECB and EU). This austerity had already sunk the Fianna Fail/Green coalition. It now threatens to devastate Labour as the junior partner in the outgoing coalition.

A wave of radicalisation has gripped Irish society. The huge majority in the referendum in favour of single sex marriage expressed a further element to this radicalisation. The polls now indicate that the final result could make the election of a coalition government from the three traditional political parties of Fianna Fail, Fine Gael and Labour extremely difficult.

The dramatic decline of the Labour Party, with poll ratings as low as 7 per cent, is another case of history repeating itself. Every time Labour gets into bed with the reactionary Fine Gael they are duly punished by their erstwhile supporters. The political organisations that claim to be anti austerity, like Sinn Fein, Anti Austerity Alliance/People before Profit (AAA/PbP) and some Independents, stand to make important gains and this could usher in a new period of governmental instability in Ireland.

Right2Water / Right2Change

The Right2Water campaign, backed by five major trade unions and the anti austerity groups, has sought to channel the widespread anger into demonstrations and a petition. Guided by the union leaders and Sinn Fein, the campaign, under the aegis of Right2Change, has refused to call for non payment despite a mass non payment campaign already in progress. Instead, they have drawn up a programme for a progressive or left government that groups could pledge themselves to and, where possible, agree vote transfers.

The programme of Right2Change has no commitments to action and was not an expression of a democratic delegate based conference of rank and file workers' organisations. This suits the style of the bureaucrat union leaders and their friends in Sinn Fein. Their 'New Fiscal Framework' document envisages a budget 'consistent with the EU's Stability and Growth Pact'. Shades of Syriza's climbdown already!

A determined stand against all the cuts couldn't be further from their minds. Sinn Fein's ambitions are brutally clear; it has ruled nothing out in regard to coalition with anyone. They do not call for direct action to stop the water charges or austerity in general. Even worse, they already have a tarnished record of

implementing Tory cuts in the north of Ireland! No one should trust or vote for them or be part of a capitalist government headed by them.

No wonder some on the left felt the need to go beyond Right2Change. The AAA, led by the Socialist Party, and the PbP, led by the Socialist Workers Party, have formed an electoral alliance. This has the merit of calling for non payment of water charges, a fight back against all austerity and refusing to entertain any involvement in a coalition with any of the three major parties. As far as it goes, this is perfectly principled and we would urge a critical vote for AAA/PbP.

We do this as a way of joining with all those workers at the polls venting their anger at the water charges and austerity. At the last election, the AAA/PbP predecessor, United Left Alliance, similarly made an electoral breakthrough with five TD's, that is set to increase.

However, socialists need to be saying a lot more in this election. PbP still seem to be bound by illusions in the Right2Change strategy, even agreeing to vote transfers to Sinn Fein. Do they really see SF as partners in a left anti austerity government? AAA correctly exclude vote transfers but are equally non committal on who they might be having discussions with regarding the formation of a left government outside FF, FG and Labour.

A new strategy

During this election, socialists should be advancing a strategy to defeat the water charges and austerity in general. Demonstrations and non payment are important contributions to stopping the water charges but the spirit of rebellion on the streets needs to be taken into the workplaces and the unions. Too many on the left are relying on an electoral victory to win the battle against water charges.

Rank and file movements, within and across every union, should hold the leaders to account. Industrial action against water charges and every austerity measure needs to be organised, with the leaders if possible, without them where necessary. Councils of action should be built in every community and workplace to organise the campaign at local level.

Socialists should use the election campaign to build the resistance and not promote illusions in the possibility that a 'left' government might do the job for us. Outside of the AAA/PbP and a handful of Left Independents, it is fanciful to suggest, a la AAA, that discussions for such a government after the election is a realistic goal - not unless they really are thinking that Sinn Fein might be part of that lash up.

Any concerted fight against austerity will require a mass movement with strikes and occupations at its heart and prepared to take on the imperialists sat in Brussels as well as their lap dogs in the next Irish government. A genuine Workers' Government must be fought for, coming out of the mass struggles of workers. Elections may aid that process but are no substitute for workers' councils forming the essential democratic accountability for such a government. The Dail will never enshrine workers' democracy and will never be the tool to abolish capitalism and usher in socialism.

A revolutionary platform, clearly spelling out a strategy for victory against austerity right through to socialism, needs to be advanced by a new workers' party in Ireland. The current electoral alliance of AAA/PbP is nothing of the kind, rather a makeshift imitation of the United Left Alliance which also failed to seize the opportunity of building a new workers' party.

Socialists need to relate to the rising tide of anger, north and south of the border, by building a new workers' party and hammering out a revolutionary socialist programme to end capitalism and imperialism in Ireland. Failure to adopt a revolutionary alternative will inevitably lead down the road of reform and

compromise, so characteristic of Labour and Sinn Fein.

The most fitting way we can commemorate the Easter Rebellion of 1916 is surely by making the first moves in building a party dedicated to James Connolly's goal of a Workers' Republic.

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